



# BACKCOUNTRY TRAILS PROGRAM: FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

## **What is the food like?**

The food is fresh and prepared by professional camp cooks who know the importance of providing nutritious, healthy food to hard-working trail crew members. Groceries are delivered once a week on the backs of sturdy mules or via helicopter. Consideration and flexibility by our members is expected due to the constraints of the weekly resupply, and the limited number of items that can be transported and stored in camp. We can accommodate a general vegetarian diet that includes dairy and egg products. However, due to cost, logistics, and supply availability constraints, we CANNOT accommodate a vegan diet or some special-needs diets that are extremely restrictive in nature.

## **Can I start the season late if I am in school?**

The Backcountry season typically runs from the third week of April until the end of September. Occasionally, we have accepted members who need to report after the Backcountry Program begins in order to complete their college requirements. We will not accept anyone who cannot start by the second week of May because they will not be able to complete the required number of AmeriCorps service hours. Likewise, we will not accept anyone who must leave the program before the season ends. Members who leave our program early are not eligible for their AmeriCorps Education award, unless they have a compelling personal circumstance involving an injury, illness, or family emergency.

## **Is there a lot of competition for the available positions?**

The Backcountry Trails Program has approximately 95 member slots to fill each spring. We typically receive many more inquiries and applications than we can accommodate. We attempt to place an equal number of men and women on each crew, and strive for as much socio-economic diversity as possible. Preference is given to those with comparable past work experience. We encourage all interested candidates to apply.

## **What qualities are considered in selecting applicants?**

When we get down to selecting the crews in mid-March, we are primarily looking to pick people who enjoy the challenge of hard physical labor and can get along well with others. We also give strong consideration to those who are motivated by a strong sense of national service and citizenship. We are only interested in hiring people willing to remain sober for the entire season. We are looking for individuals who are willing and capable of putting the interests and welfare of others above their own. A crew functions best when it's composed of selfless people, who put the needs of the crew above their own. We expect everyone to make many personal sacrifices for the good of the team, and do more than their share to turn their crew into a Healthy Community. The following criteria (in no particular order) are typically considered in determining qualification and selection:

- Affiliation (past or present) with a conservation or service corps
- Job history, performance, longevity
- Age, general life experience, future opportunities to join the backcountry
- Experience living in groups such as dormitories, shared housing with roommates, etc.
- Athletic experience including both competitive and organized sports as well as individual fitness activity
- Wilderness/outdoors experience

- Advanced first-aid training (e.g. EMT, 1st-Responder, Wilderness 1st-Aid, Wilderness 1st-Responder, Wilderness EMT, etc.)
- Desire for the position
- Adventurous/unconventional spirit as demonstrated by past experiences of doing things, such as taking trips, participating in "out-of-character" activities that do not necessarily follow from the conventional "to-be-expected" course of events relative to an applicant's background
- Volunteer experiences
- Intangible personal qualities, (i.e. demonstrable strength of character, heart, charisma, spirit, hard-core, compassion, giving personality, humor, etc.)
- Ability and willingness to follow programmatic rules that pertain to health and safety, and building strong communities.
- Ability to take supervision
- Other intangible qualities demonstrated by applications, reference evaluations, and personal/telephone interviews

#### **Is there time off available from the Backcountry season?**

The short answer is not typically. There are exceptions to this on a case-by-case basis for certain situations (e.g. family weddings; graduations; family emergencies such as illness, accident, or death; etc.). These exceptions must be approved by the Crew Supervisor and Program Director. An applicant should not depend on time-off during the season.

#### **What are my chances for post-season job placement if I complete the season?**

For those crew members who complete the season with an exemplary record of productive effort at work, a successful engagement in the social life of the crew, and a high level of initiative in accomplishing camp chores and other community needs, there are good to excellent opportunities for future employment in the field of trail maintenance and construction. Over the history of the Backcountry Trails Program, there have been several thousand Backcountry graduates, and over 700 of these graduates have continued to work trails for state or federal land management agencies all over the country. There have also been many other graduates who have found employment in wildland and structure firefighting, forestry, and other natural resources careers. The CCC/AmeriCorps Backcountry Program is the only one of its kind in the country, and is a good stepping-stone into a career working with land management agencies.

#### **What are the curriculum requirements about in the Backcountry?**

The Backcountry Trails Program involves more than fixing trails. While the most obvious element of the experience is the hard work and the wilderness setting, the requirements for success in the Program go far beyond these. Community involvement and personal improvement are the overriding themes that crew members need to commit themselves to. The traditional Backcountry Season is generally experienced in developmental stages. The beginning of the season where the learning curve is high in many areas, the middle where crew dynamics become a focus, and the final months where work production and personal growth are predominant. The training and educational component of the Backcountry Program parallels these transformational elements to a Backcountry Season. You should expect to be occupied four nights a week with nightly and educational activities. The subject matter is varied, including natural history, Spanish, literacy, crew member-taught-subjects, and recreational activities.

Other topics for class include community and team building, journal writing, designing the crew T-shirt, reading aloud, career development and resume writing, conservation awareness, map and compass use, minimum impact camping techniques, wilderness survival and primitive skills, and wherever else the intellectual curiosity of the crew takes the curriculum program. We do our best to bring in outside instructors and/or National Park Service or Forest Service staff to teach classes, but the bulk of nightly activities planning will come from the Backcountry Supervisor and crew members. Participation in the curriculum is a Backcountry Trails Program and AmeriCorps requirement, and is necessary in order to receive the AmeriCorps Education Award.

### **How can I get more information?**

All Backcountry Applicants are encouraged to find out as much as possible about the Backcountry Program in order to decide whether or not this unique opportunity is what you're really looking for. As wonderful as the Backcountry Program is, it is definitely not for everyone. To assist you with your research, a number of our recent graduates have generously offered to serve as information sources, and have given us their phone numbers to pass along to serious applicants. Other sources of information include a video profiling two past Backcountry crews. Finally, by contacting us via phone, letter, or e-mail, there is the opportunity to have an initial orientation by phone.

### **Can I have any visitors while I'm in the program?**

Allowing our members to have visitors while in our program is not guaranteed.

While the Backcountry Trails Program knows and understands the possible value and benefit of our members having a guest visit, we also know that there can be negative consequences and that there are certain times during a season that guests should not be allowed. The decision to allow any guests to visit a crew and to determine when, how many, and for how long is ultimately jointly made by the Crew Supervisor, the Backcountry Program Director and the Agency Sponsors. The Sponsors' Visitor Use Policies will also determine if guests can be allowed.

### **Is there any opportunity for me to explore the wilderness on my own, or be alone out there?**

No. We have a very strict "Buddy System" Policy in place that states no member is allowed to go anywhere outside of camp alone. Meaning, hikes to and from the work site or camp locations are done in groups, and weekend backpacking trips are done in groups of three or more people. The only opportunity our members will have to be alone is when they're in the immediate vicinity of camp. Our "Buddy System" Policy is a necessary component of our Health and Safety Policy and will be explained in depth to our members once they arrive at orientation and enforced throughout the entire season.